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SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY IN A CONGREGATION.

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."—
Acts ii. 47.

NEVER was there a cause more hopeless of success, than the cause of Christ, at the commencement of its progress on earth. It had arrayed against it the prejudice and the power of the whole Jewish nation; and of the whole Gentile world too. Its friends were few and despised—without wealth, without learning, without power. Its founder had just been condemned and crucified as a malefactor, and the little flock that had followed him on earth, intimidated and discouraged by the storms of persecution that began to rage around them, quit the field—retired into an upper room in Jerusalem.

Close the page of history now, and tell me, men of the world, what became of this cause? Did it survive a single generation? Did its advocates ever dare renew their efforts to defend or to propagate it? Were they not speedily crushed by the same hand of power that had been raised to destroy their Leader? and did not every vestige of the religion to which they were devoted, pass away in a few brief years, as forgotten superstition? So it might have been predicted with absolute certainty, according to all principles of human calculation. But look at the fact. Upon the very spot of its apparent defeat, christianity set up its standard, and commenced the conquest of the world. Within ten days after the ascension of our Lord, three thousand were added to the number of his disciples. Shortly after, the number was raised to five thousand. Then we hear of great multitudes, both of men and women, joining themselves to the Lord; and the cause continued to advance. till within about thirty years after the death of Christ, it had not only extended its conquests to all the principal cities of Asia Minor and Greece, but penetrated to the heart of the Roman empire, and set up its banner by the palace of the Cæsars. Thence its victories were spread abroad, till, under Constantine, the empire became christian; and the temples of idolatry were closed, and the altars of impiety demolished.

If now we inquire for the cause of this rapid spread of the gospel, this wonderful increase of the church, the secret is disclosed in our text. The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. The power of his Spirit attended the ministration of his word, and all obstacles fell before it. In this fact we have not only a sure pledge of the final triumph of the gospel over the earth, but are pointed directly to the *means* on which we can rely in efforts to hasten on the glorious consummation. The means are as simple as they are efficacious. They are *light* and *love*; truth in the mind and affection in the heart, impelling the friends of Christ to labor, in faith and zeal and prayer, for the salvation of others; and the Lord working with them, accessions will continually be made to the church of such as shall be saved, till the whole world shall be converted to God.

But not to dwell on so great a subject as the ultimate spread of the gospel over the earth, it will better comport with the object I have in view, to show how the great design of the gospel can best be promoted in a particular congregation, within the sphere of our own personal influence. I propose, therefore, in the present discourse,

I. To consider in what the true prosperity of a congregation, including church and society, consists; and then,

II. Point out some of the means best adapted to promote that prosperity.

I. In what then does the true prosperity of a congregation consist? This to some may seem too plain a question to need a formal answer. But if I mistake not, there is a great want of clear and just views on this subject. Many appear to think of the prosperity of a religious society much as they do of the prosperity of a manufacturing company, or of a banking establishment. Their conceptions are all earthly, secular, selfish; leaving entirely out of mind the *spiritual* character of the association, and the peculiarity of the end for which it exists.

Let it be observed, then, that the prosperity of a congregation does not consist in the *number* of its members. The one hundred and twenty disciples who were collected together in an upper room in Jerusalem, and there continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, had more moral power, and were qualified to exert a mightier influence on the spiritual condition of the world, than all the thousands who then composed the Jewish church. The one was a collection of true christians—of living members of Christ's body; the other was a dead carcass, in which the principle of spiritual life was extinct.

That numbers, associated in a congregation, do not constitute its prosperity, how impressively does the Savior teach us, in the fact, that when multitudes, under a mistaken notion of the nature and design of his kingdom, followed him from place to place, he often disappointed and dispersed them by inculcating some weighty truth, or enjoining some self denying duty, which would detect their false hopes, and cause them to turn back and walk no more with him. Our blessed Lord regarded no one as a friend who was not ready to

forsake all for him, and nothing as adding strength to his cause but the living piety and practical devotedness of his followers to the interests of his kingdom. And this is as true now as it was in the days of his flesh.

Nor does the prosperity of a congregation consist in the *wealth* of its individual or associated members. A religious society may have wealth and grandeur and worldly power, and yet be, in the eyes of the Savior, both wretched and poor and blind and naked. It was so with the church of the Laodiceans; and it is so with many a church in this land at the present day—rich in worldly goods, but poor in all the graces of the Spirit. It is an instructive lesson, taught us by all history, that the worst days of the church have been the days of her greatest worldly grandeur. It is with religious societies as with individuals; not one in a thousand can maintain a spirit of humble, useful piety, amid the fascinations of high life, or the corrupting influences of wealth and station.

Nor again does the prosperity of a congregation consist in the mere *harmony* of its members. Union is strength in this case only where it is based on truth and holiness, and is cemented by the flowing together of hearts, warmed with the love of God and bent upon doing his will. The harmony of stupidity and worldliness, of pride and self sufficiency and self pleasedness, is no evidence of prosperity, but the reverse. It is like the repose that steals over the body when its vital powers are sinking under some mortal disease. There is harmony in the grave yard, but there are no fruits unto holiness there. Contentions and divisions in a congregation are indeed a great evil; but they are scarcely greater than the stagnation of spiritual insensibility and lukewarmness. Many a church and society have sunk into utter decay and fruitlessness, under the calm of indifference to truth and God, and contentment with their condition of peace and harmony.

Nor, once more, does the prosperity of a congregation consist in the convenience or splendor of its *exterior accommodations*. These are not to be undervalued; neither are they to have the first or the second place in our estimation. There were those of old, in the Jewish church, who boasted of their external privileges, and were wont to cry: "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these;" while yet they lay under the rebuke of Jehovah for trusting in lying words, and were bidden to amend their ways lest they should fall under impending judgments. The worship which was wont to be paid, in primitive times, in some deserted out-house, or cave, or solitary retreat, was far more acceptable to God than all the gorgeous rites and ceremonies of the Jewish temple service. It is not the splendor of the edifice in which we worship, nor the cushioned seats on which we sit, nor the melting notes of music, swelled by the organ's rich tones, nor all the talent and learning that can be made to emanate from the pulpit, that can suffice to build up a congregation in holiness, or make them a people prepared unto the Lord. These things may attract the gay, the thought-

less and the worldly ; and for a time, while the novelty lasts, may fill the place of worship with those who go there to be amused ; and a looker on, deceived by appearances, might say, *there is a flourishing congregation* ; but to the eye of Him who looketh beyond appearances, all this may be but empty show, vain, unmeaning compliment. Something beyond all this is necessary to the true prosperity of a religious society. What that is can be stated in a few words.

The great design of God in the organization of local churches, and of societies as connected with them, is the edification of christians in the faith and love of the gospel ; and the conversion of sinners to the knowledge and belief of the truth. In other words, it is to promote holiness in the church and salvation among the impenitent. All other ends are inferior and subordinate to this ; and any congregation may be regarded as prosperous or otherwise, just in proportion as this great end of its existence is secured or not. Where the work of spiritual edification is going on in a religious society, christians growing in grace, and sinners, under the influence of truth and the Spirit of God, are awakened to think on their ways and turn unto the Lord, there is true prosperity in a congregation ; for there is attained the great end for which congregations are organized, and for which God sends to them his gospel and the various means of grace.

The way is now prepared to consider —

II. The means of spiritual prosperity in a congregation.

1. A faithful devoted ministry. And by this we mean, not a ministry of talent and learning merely, but a ministry of truth and piety ; intelligent in the scriptures, serious, laborious, prayerful ; seeking not so much to be popular as to be useful ; not so much to please as to bring to repentance and a holy life ; bold, independent, decided in duty, yet kind, conciliating and yielding in things non-essential ; and which, while it meditates much and deeply on the great truths which are unto salvation, that so it may impart worth and power to its Sabbath ministrations, loves also to go forth from the retirement of the study to mingle with the people in acts of sympathy and pastoral attentions ; and thus enforces, in the intimacy of private intercourse, the lessons of instruction and warning which it is wont to publish from the pulpit.

A ministry of this character turns into feebleness all the efforts of mere talent and genius. It may have but little to attract or please a mere worldly mind ; but it has that which, in the prosperity of a congregation, is of more importance than all talent and learning ; that which God owns and blesses in the conversion of sinners and in the building up of his own people in faith and love.

The kind of ministry best adapted to promote the true interests of a religious society is often greatly misunderstood. The first question with many, in the call and settlement of a minister, is, not whether he is sound in the faith, eminently pious, devoted and active ; but, is he a 'smart man,' a 'man of talents,' a 'popular preacher ?' And they are wont to estimate his ministrations, not by their adaptedness to feed the church of God and bring sinners to repentance and a holy

life, but by their being characterized by popular and attractive qualities, fine speaking, eloquent sentences, and brilliant images.

Now all this is entire mistake, and is doing immense mischief in many of the congregations in our land. It is a mistake founded in a total misapprehension as to the nature and design of the ministry.—Instead of its being regarded as ordained of God, to make men holy and fit them for heaven, it is converted into a mere vehicle of intellectual entertainment or of tasteful amusement. Let it not be thought that we attach little importance to talents and learning and eloquence in the ministry. Would to God that all his servants possessed these gifts in a much larger measure than they do; provided also that they possessed a piety which would sanctify these gifts and lay them all at the foot of the cross.

But alone, or when allowed to hold the chief place in the estimation of a congregation, they are of little worth in promoting its spiritual prosperity. Nay, in many cases, their only effect is to bring on spiritual decay and fruitlessness. And hence the fact, that many congregations wither and die, under what is called popular preaching, while many others are edified in truth and holiness under a ministry of little pretensions to genius or distinguished talent, but plain, serious, and devoted to the Master's work in the Master's way.

It cannot be too deeply impressed on our minds, that however distinguished the instrument employed in dispensing the truth to a congregation, the excellency of the power is all of God; and God will bless no ministry that does not consecrate all its attainments to his glory, and labor to advance his cause in the use of the very means which he in his infinite wisdom has seen fit to appoint. Among these means, I need not say, a clear and full exhibition of God's truth holds the first place. It is the extremest folly to think of building up the cause of Christ by a compromise or concealment of the great distinguishing doctrines of his gospel. True, these doctrines are not agreeable to the unsanctified heart; and when hard pressed with them, sinners often feel as if they could bear it no longer; still there is something in them so deeply interesting and solemn, something that so commends itself to the conscience and the felt wants of the soul, that they will come again and again to the place where they are plainly and faithfully preached, and listen with unspeakably more attention and feeling than they ever do to preaching from which these doctrines are excluded.

Let the ministry, then, that would see the work of the Lord prospering among the people of its charge, be plain and discriminating in its exhibitions of the great doctrines and duties of the gospel,—the character and the law of God, the guilt and ruin of man, his help in the atoning blood of Christ, and the agency of a sanctifying Spirit, together with the calls and warnings of divine mercy, and the rewards and punishments of another world. These are the only elements of effective and useful preaching; and the ministry that dwells upon them with affectionate earnestness and frequency, pointing to the awful realities of sin, of death, and the terrors of a coming judg-

ment on the one hand ; and on the other, to the peace speaking blood of Jesus, and the proffered aids of the Spirit, and the crown of life in heaven ; will never be left to address empty walls or a drowsy audience, but will gather around it a people hungering for the bread of life, and in earnest in the business of salvation.

2. Another thing essential to the prosperity of a congregation is spirituality in the church, a living active piety in the professed people of God. The church is styled by the apostle the pillar and ground of the truth ;—the great instrument of sustaining and propagating true religion in the world. This is said of the church universal ; the whole body of believers. But each individual church possesses this same character just so far as it is a true church of Christ. It is the distinguishing character of every such church, that it *believes* and *feels* and *practically* exhibits the truth of God, as revealed in his word, and puts forth proper efforts to spread that truth through the world. And no man is qualified to unite with the church, or can stand approved as a worthy member of it, only so far as he is prepared and disposed to live and to labor for the furtherance of this great design of the church's existence—the maintaining and extending of the reign of truth and holiness on earth.

Now a church that truly sustains this high character, whether its members be few or many, rich or poor in this world's goods, must, of necessity, exert a powerful influence in the community where it exists. It is a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Its members, both in their associated and individual character, shine as lights in the world. They are living illustrations of the truth and power of the gospel ; standing out to the eye of the community as a society of a distinctive, holy character ; and the effect is great in giving efficacy to the means of grace, and aiding the ministry in the work of saving souls.

Indeed, every year's experience has gone to convince me, more and more, that the most faithful ministry can ordinarily accomplish very little in promoting the spiritual interests of a congregation without the efficient co-operation of the church. It is the ministry and the church combined, not either alone, but both combined as a joint, co-operating agency, which is the instrument appointed of God for the conversion of men. The missionary, who labors where there is no church, may hope for success through his labors alone ; but not the pastor, who labors in the midst of a church that withholds the co-operation of its prayers and efforts ; or which does not sustain the character of a truly living, spiritual church. The instrumentality ordained of God is not employed. An essential part of it is kept back, and little or no fruit is gathered unto eternal life.

Here, I doubt not, is one principal cause why many a faithful minister is left to wear out his life with comparatively little success in his work. He is left to labor alone. There is a want of spirituality in the church ; of living, active piety in those who should be his helpers in the Lord. Instead of sustaining him in his labors by their sympathy and co-operation and prayers, they dishearten and discourage him by their indifference and worldliness ; and thus counteract and defeat

the proper influence of the means of grace. The world will form their opinion of religion from the conduct of those who profess it, much more than from what is said of it from the pulpit or in the Bible. Example speaks louder than words. If professing christians show no interest in religion, beyond a mere profession of it, the inference is a very natural one, that it is of no importance. And this inference will be drawn by impenitent men. No preaching on earth can prevent it; and the effect is fatal. Though an angel from heaven should preach the gospel on the Sabbath, he would labor in vain, if the members of the church, or any considerable number of them, were all the week contradicting his preaching by their indifference to the gospel and the high concerns of eternity. It is no difficult thing, and I fear no uncommon thing, for the members of a church to defeat entirely the great ends of the ministry, as exercised among them, and to render the gospel of no power in respect to the conviction and conversion of sinners. The beloved John felt this; and therefore exhorted the disciples of his day,—Look to yourselves that we lose not those things that we have wrought among you, but that we receive a full reward. And the apostle Paul felt this; and therefore, when he went forth preaching the gospel, he cast himself on the prayers of the brethren, and besought the fellowship of their sympathy and labors, that so the word of God might have free course and run and be glorified.

It is only when a church exhibits to the world a visible exemplification of the spirit and power of true religion; it is only when its members, realizing the end for which they have been called into the kingdom of the Savior, go forth at his bidding, to do his will, and can be appealed to, as were christians of old, as “living epistles of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, seen and read of all men;” it is only when a church sustains the character of manifest spirituality, abiding in Christ and striving with the ministry to carry forward the great design of his mediation, that it answers the true end of its organization, or exerts the influence which it is commissioned to exert in promoting the interests of religion in the community where it exists.

Hence the necessity of great carefulness in the admission of members to the church, that none enter it but such as are approved of God and are prepared to bear the responsibilities and perform the duties of church membership,—the necessity also of maintaining a kind, but vigilant discipline, that such as sin may be reclaimed, and if not reclaimed, may be removed, that so the church be not despised nor the word of God blasphemed.

A church that opens the door of its communion to unsanctified persons, or retains in its bosom those who dishonor God by corrupt sentiments or wicked lives, may exist indeed; but it exists not as a city set on a hill to guide men to holiness and heaven, but as a baleful meteor to blind and deceive them on their way to eternity.

3. The prosperity of a congregation demands that special attention be paid to the religious instruction of the young. The children and

youth of a congregation are its principal hope as to future accessions of strength and support. It is among these especially, that God gathers the trophies of his grace, and raises up instruments to carry forward his cause in the world. Search the records of our churches, and you will find that the greater part of those who give evidence of piety in them, were converted in early life; most of them under twenty years of age; few above thirty; fewer still above forty; and above fifty, not one in a hundred. A husbandman would see but little encouragement to cultivate trees that had stood a half a century in his garden without bearing fruit. He would rather turn his attention to the tender shoots, and to plants just springing from the ground. So in cultivating the vineyard of the Lord; the great aim should be to take care of the young; to bring them as early as possible under the influence of an efficient system of religious instruction, that so they may rise up a generation prepared for the service of the Lord.

The system of Sabbath school teaching, wisely and vigorously conducted, is above all praise; and no congregation can expect to prosper, at this day, in which such a school is not maintained, and its children gathered into it, and efficiently instructed by the pious and intelligent part of its members.

But in addition to this, family instruction and household religion must be maintained. This was constantly and universally done in the early days of New England; and it has effected more than any other means, to keep alive and perpetuate piety and truth in our churches. *There is no substitute for family instruction.* Parents cannot throw off this duty upon Sabbath schools, without irreparable loss both to themselves and their offspring. God has committed it to *them*, and upon their faithful discharge of it, depends the character of the rising generation, and consequently, the state of religion in the community where they dwell. The neglect of parental instruction is like a frost in spring or a drought in summer; it cuts off the hope of harvest, and brings on blight and ruin. We could earnestly wish that the good old custom of catechetical instruction were revived in all our families, and practised, as in former days, by the pastors of all our churches. The effect, we cannot doubt, would be eminently happy, in reviving religion and raising up a generation to serve God when the present generation has passed away.

But whatever means may be adopted in the religious instruction of the young, the duty itself is admitted by all to be one of supreme importance. It lies at the very foundation of congregational prosperity, and should engage the special regards both of pastor and people. Every church, in a particular manner, is bound to strive together in its prayers and efforts for its baptized children and youth. They have been consecrated to God, that they might be trained up for his service and kingdom; and though not properly members of the church, they sustain a *peculiar* relation to the church; are entitled, in virtue of their baptism, to peculiar privileges, and have peculiar promises made to them; and every church that would see religion prospering in their midst, should not fail to give special attention to its baptized youth,

bearing them to the throne of grace in the prayers of the family and the congregation, and collecting them, from time to time, to receive pastoral instruction, and to be commended to God in the united supplications of the whole assembled brotherhood.

4. Another thing essential to the prosperity of a congregation is a serious and habitual attendance upon the means of grace. The Sabbath, the ministry, the sanctuary, and the various services performed there, are of no use to those who neglect them; and are of very little use to those who do not attend upon them with constancy and religious seriousness. Those persons who attend public worship only occasionally, or half a day on the Sabbath, or who attend from mere custom or fashion, with no proper impression of the solemn nature of the services in which they engage, pervert and abuse the means of grace; and so far as practical utility is concerned, might almost as well never enter a place of worship. It is a very great evil, when people fall into the habit of irregularity in their attendance upon the worship of God in his house, or when they come there as a mere matter of form or decent observance. In sending the means of grace to a people, God sends them the offer of salvation, and upon the manner in which they improve them, depends their condition in eternity.

What we wish to inculcate under this head, is the habit of attending upon the means of grace, *as means ordained of God for the spiritual improvement and salvation of the soul*,—the habit of attending upon them constantly and prayerfully, with a serious desire to be made wise by them unto eternal life. It is needless to remark the effect of such an attendance upon the spiritual state of a congregation. While it indicates a high degree of present prosperity, it is the surest means of perpetuating and extending it in time to come. It has been ascertained by an examination of facts, and it accords with the observation of every pastor, that by far the greater part of those who regularly attend public worship, sooner or later become christians, and die in the hope of salvation; while it is one of the rarest occurrences, that one who neglects public worship, or attends upon it only occasionally and carelessly, is ever brought to repentance and hope of life.

But besides the stated worship of God on the Sabbath, there are other occasional services during the week, which have been found of great importance to the spiritual welfare of a congregation. Among these are the meetings for familiar instruction and lecturing, for conference and prayer and consultation. All experience goes to demonstrate the utility of such meetings. They bring the pastor into easy and familiar intercourse with his people; are most happily adapted to keep alive a spirit of piety in the church, and to awaken and direct inquiry among the impenitent. No congregation can expect to prosper in its spiritual interests, in which these meetings are neglected, or are attended upon coldly and formally. Especially may this be said of the meetings of the church for consultation and

prayer. They are an infallible index of the state of religion in a church, and are at the same time most intimately connected with the prosperity of religion in a congregation. Show me a church where the prayer meeting is thinly attended or not attended at all, and I will show you a church where the pulse of spiritual life beats low, and stupidity and death reign among the impenitent. Strange that churches are so slow to learn their dependence on God, their continual need of his presence and Spirit, and the essential importance of prayer to the enjoyment of these blessings.

No community on earth is intrusted with interests so diversified, important and difficult, as are committed to every church of Christ. It is called to maintain the cause of truth and piety in the community where it exists, to consult and act for the religious education of the young, for the conversion of sinners, and the extension of Christ's kingdom on earth. And yet how next to impossible is it to convene stately the members of almost any church to attend to these high interests, and pray for the blessing of God on their labors. The directors of a banking concern are wont to meet every day to transact their secular business. But the members of our churches, at least great numbers of them, seem to think it too much to meet once a week, or even once a month, to spend an hour in consulting and praying together, for the salvation of men and the progress of the Redeemer's cause in the world. This is all wrong; and it operates fatally to obstruct the prosperity of religion. It was not thus that the primitive churches became the lights of the world and the means of extending the triumphs of the cross into a thousand lands. With them the cause of the Savior was a common cause; and they devoted to it their best energies. And so it must be again, before the gospel will have free course among men, and the light of millennial day rise to bless this dark world.

5. It is essential to the prosperity of a congregation, that the friends of God in it feel a benevolent concern for the spiritual interests of those around them, and put forth serious and direct efforts for their salvation.

The design of God, we have said, in the organization of a church, is not its own edification alone; there is another still more important end in view—the conversion of sinners within the sphere of its influence; and no church answers the end of its being, that does not undertake this work in *serious earnest*.

In addition to family instruction and Sabbath schools, and efforts made in behalf of baptized children, there is a wide field for benevolent exertion, in relation to growing multitudes in the midst of us, who are living in a condition as hopeless of salvation, as the heathen themselves. I say in the midst of us;—for they are to be found within the limits of all our parishes, at our very doors, and in the bosom of our families, it may be. Yes, within the sound of your church bell, or within a half hour's walk of the place where we are met, there are hundreds, among them many entire families, who live

in the habitual neglect of the gospel and all its ordinances; and who, with none to care for their souls, are passing on to death and eternity in a state of undisturbed ignorance and sin.

It has been ascertained from unquestionable data, that from one quarter to one third of the people, even in the most favored portions of our highly favored New England, who are of a proper age to attend public worship, live in the habitual neglect of this duty, and are as really, though voluntarily, separated from all the saving influences of the gospel, as are the pagans of another continent. This is an appalling fact, and may well awaken the deepest solicitude in all the friends of religion. If something be not soon done to check the progress of this wide spreading evil, it will ere long act with tremendous effect upon our churches and congregations, and uproot the gospel from many a place where its ministrations are now enjoyed. And what can be done to turn back this great and growing evil? How is that part of our population to be reached, who neglect the Sabbath and the house of God? How can they be roused from their lethargy in sin, and brought under the enlightening and saving influences of the gospel? Will they, by a primary impulse from themselves, seek the means of grace? No more than the heathen will come to your shores, seeking your Sabbaths and your Bibles. The first movement must be made *towards them*, by those who love and care for their souls.

They must be sought, and kindly conversed with, and taken by the hand, and brought to the place where the means of grace are dispensed, and there furnished with such accommodations as may retain them under the influence of a preached gospel. Here is work for the pious and benevolent in our churches, and it is work that must be done. Is it your duty to send the gospel to the heathen? and is it not equally your duty to attempt the salvation of those who are perishing at your own doors? Is it an act of benevolence to bring a poor pagan to the knowledge of God? and is it not equally an act of benevolence to persuade your careless, impenitent neighbor to keep the Sabbath, and occupy a place in the sanctuary, where he may learn his duty and be saved? If churches and societies, trusting to their own wealth and strength, and satisfied with their own abundant privileges, become indifferent to the spiritual wants of the perishing around and in the midst of them, God will withdraw from them his blessings, turn their strength into weakness, their wealth into poverty, and their light will go out in darkness. How many churches are there in the land, which, instead of increasing in spiritual strength, are pining away and ready to die, in the midst of the best advantages ever granted to men, just because they feel rich and strong, and care not for the spiritual welfare of those who are perishing within sight of their sanctuaries! It is absolutely indispensable to the spiritual health and vigor of any church, that its members be employed in doing good; that they habituate themselves to care, to pray and act for the salvation of those whom divine providence brings within the range of their influence. And what field so ap-

propriate to engage their benevolent exertions, as that which lies spread out under their very eye, — perishing immortals, passing on with them to the scenes of eternal destiny, in ignorance and neglect of the great salvation? What might not be accomplished, if the members of our churches, in the true spirit of their Master, were earnestly to set themselves to the work of reclaiming these unhappy persons to duty and to God? It cannot be done by the pastors alone. They may lead and help in it; but they need, and must have the efficient co-operation of christians; and acting in joint agency in this matter, what great things might be done! A tract might be given to one, a book lent to another, a kind word spoken to another, the offer of a seat in the church, or of a place in the Sabbath school for the children might be made to another, and christian sympathy and love might be manifested to all; and while those engaged in this work would find a rich reward in the increase of their piety and joy and hope, multitudes, now perishing in sin, would be gathered into the congregation and ultimately into the church, who would be its strength and support, when those who were instrumental in turning them to righteousness, are gone to their rest in heaven.

6. Closely connected with this topic, and not less essential to the prosperity of a congregation, is the habit of bearing an active part in the benevolent operations of the day. It is with churches as with individuals; they that water shall also themselves be watered; they that scatter abroad the treasures of life, are themselves enriched with the graces of the Spirit, and shine as lights in the world. No fact is established by a greater amount of experience than this. The way to have much religion at home, is to carry much of it abroad. The way for a church to grow strong is to go out of itself, and learn to feel and act for the salvation of a dying world.

The grand design of the Savior, in establishing a church on earth, is, that it might fulfil his purpose of love, in causing his gospel to be preached to every creature; and every local church that acts on this principle, or answers, in any good degree, this great end of its existence, has the promise of the continual presence of the Redeemer to secure both its prosperity and its perpetuity. When was it ever known, that a church, acting in the spirit of an enlarged benevolence, devising and executing liberal things for the good of mankind, became feeble or fell under spiritual decay? And when, on the contrary, was it ever known that a church was prospered, whose members were indifferent to the calls of benevolence, and took no active part in helping forward the great object of the world's conversion?

So thoroughly am I convinced of the inseparable connection between benevolent effort and congregational prosperity, that I know of no method, which I would so soon recommend to a feeble church or society for reviving their strength, and building themselves up, as that of caring and giving for the good of others; and on no ground could I so certainly predict the spiritual decay and final ruin of a congregation, as that of its looking coldly on the great objects of benevo-

lence, and refusing to bear a part in accomplishing the end at which they aim, the spread of the gospel through the world.

7. There is one other thing, more important than any yet mentioned to the prosperity of a congregation; *it is the presence and blessing of the Holy Spirit*. Without this, all other means are of no use. Paul may plant and Apollos water; but it is God who giveth the increase. And where the increase of God is not given, there is no spiritual prosperity. It is little that a congregation may deem itself strong in wealth, in numbers, in union, and the possession of all outward accommodations and means of grace. In the enjoyment of all these advantages, many a congregation has been smitten with spiritual decay, and sunk into imbecility and weakness. It is the presence of God in his house that constitutes its real glory, and makes it the gate of heaven to those who worship there. It is his Spirit, attending the ministration of his word and ordinances, that renders them profitable to the people, and builds them up in faith and love. And no minister or people should rest satisfied with outward advantages, however perfect they may be, nor think themselves prosperous, when the work of spiritual edification and conversion is not going on.

When this is the case, it is certain that there is something wrong, and the evil, whatever it be, should be sought out and removed, and no rest be taken till the presence of God be restored, and his Spirit is felt to be near, in those secret, yet mighty influences, by which he subdues all things to himself. And when those influences are granted, then is prosperity enjoyed in the highest and best sense. The pastor, quickened and encouraged in his work, preaches, with peculiar unction and power, the truths which are unto salvation. The church arises and shines, her light being come, and the glory of the Lord being risen upon her. The congregation feels the mighty presence of God, and is awed into silence and thoughtfulness before him. The Sabbath, the sanctuary, the place of conference and prayer, and all the means of grace, seem invested with a divine and all-subduing power, and many are seen coming forward to join themselves to the Lord in the bonds of an everlasting covenant. So it is when a congregation is favored with the presence and the Spirit of God. All obstacles fall before him; and his truth, clothed with his power, goes forth from conquering to conquer. Here is the only sure basis of spiritual prosperity. As revivals of religion are our only hope for the conversion of the world, so are they for the prosperity of religion in any religious society. Their cessation, even for a short time, brings on declension and decay, which threatens utter desolation; what then would be the consequence of their entire suspension? Vital religion would become extinct in our churches; and "churches without vital religion are but the splendid sepulchre of souls, and the gateway to hell."

Having thus pointed out what seem to us some of the most essential means of congregational prosperity, what remains, my friends, but that we commend them to the special regards of the religious society which takes possession to-day of the place in which its future worship is to be paid to the Most High God? It is well, my brethren, that you have erected this goodly edifice, and furnished it with all that is necessary to the comfort and convenience of public worship. It is in good keeping with your own substantial prosperity, and with the sacred object to which you have dedicated it; and it may well be regarded as among the means of rendering you a prosperous congregation.

But, my friends, you will not forget, that all this expense of property, and display of art and taste, will be in vain, if you look not beyond your outward accommodations; if you enjoy not the presence of God in the services which are here to be performed. With devout thankfulness, then, for past favors received from the hand of your God, enter this new temple, which you have erected for his praise, with fervent and united supplications, that he would enter it with you, and here abide forever to bless you with his presence and his love. Let that same gospel be continued to be preached here, under the influence of which you have been raised up from small beginnings to become two bands, and have now found it necessary for your accommodation, to provide this enlarged and more convenient place of worship. The saving power of that gospel has often been proved in the midst of you, by the repeated revivals of religion which you have enjoyed, and by which great numbers have been gathered into the fold of the Savior on earth, and prepared for his kingdom in heaven. Let not that gospel be exchanged for another, which is yet not another; but continue, as in time past, to desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby. Let the church realize the end for which it was organized and has an existence in the midst of this community; and let its members, from this day, rise up to a higher standard of piety, and strive together, in their prayers and efforts, for the salvation of the rising generation, especially of the lambs of the flock who have upon them the seal of the covenant. If you would have the means of grace, which you hope here to enjoy, effectual to build you up in holiness and make you meet for heaven, attend upon them with constancy; attend upon them with seriousness and religious veneration.

With the return of every Sabbath, and at other times as you have opportunity, repair, with grateful minds, to this sanctuary to meet your God and Savior, and receive from him the blessings which he ever waits to bestow upon true worshipers. And while you are thus blessed with hearing the joyful sound of the gospel, and are cheered on your way to eternity with the hope full of immortality, forget not the condition of perishing men around you; but seriously set about the work of saving them, that they may share with you in the joys and hopes of eternal life. Go out, in the spirit of your Mas-

ter, into the highways and hedges, into the streets and lanes of your town, seek out the poor and the neglected, the unwarned and the ignorant, and bring them to the house of God, that they may hear his word and live.

Nor forget the poor, dying heathen, but pity them as the Savior pitied you; and strive, with others, to send to them the blessings of the great salvation. And withal, let your prayers ascend up to God daily, that he would pour out upon you his Spirit, to give efficacy to the means of grace, and revive his work among you with power and glory. Set your hearts upon this as an attainable blessing; and remember that it is a blessing essential to all spiritual prosperity. Pray then for the effusions of the Holy Spirit upon you. Welcome this mighty, this gracious, this all-subduing Spirit to your bosoms, to your families, to your church and congregation, and let the opening of a new place of worship be signalized by the commencement of a revival of religion. This will do more to make you a prosperous and happy people, than all other means combined. The Holy Spirit dwelling with you, a preached gospel will be to you a savor of life unto life. The services of the Sabbath and of the sanctuary will be instinct with life and power, and build you up in truth and love. Sinners awakened from the sleep of death, will turn their feet into the path of life, and come here in growing crowds, to devote themselves to their Redeemer and God. The aged, as they pass from the stage of life, will rejoice to see others rising up to fill their places as the servants of God; and parents, as they descend into the vale of years, will be happy in seeing their children treading in their steps, and preparing to follow them to heaven. Thus blessed with the presence of God's Spirit, you will be built up on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, and can never fall. You will be safe amid all changes, and safe forever. The Lord will plant his banner over you, which is love; and so long as that floats above your sanctuary, the gates of hell will not prevail against you.

Hear, then, fellow immortals, all of you, the word of exhortation. As you have dedicated this house, so dedicate yourselves to God, and take refuge, every one, beneath the pavilion of his mercy. Then, when this temple, in which we now feebly attempt the high praises of God, shall be crumbled into dust, when all the monuments of art and works of man shall be consumed by the fires of the last day, you shall bow and worship in a temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, and forever adore the hand that formed it, the grace that conducted you to it, and the Savior who fills it with his presence and glory.

SERMON CCCXXII.

BY REV. JOHN S. C. ABBOTT,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN NANTUCKET.

RECIPROCAL DUTIES OF PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

"Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers."—ACTS xx. 28.

THE time was when the pastoral union was invested with a degree of permanency which it has now unhappily lost. It is my prayer that it may speedily be restored, and that, if it be the divine will, the relation into which we have entered may not be severed till death shall sever it. Though we know not what an hour may bring forth, I would hope to resign my body to the dust of your burial ground, and there, as a faithful pastor, sleeping in the midst of his beloved flock, await the resurrection summons.

It seems important, upon this occasion, that we should reflect upon the reciprocal duties of pastor and people.

1. The preaching of the gospel is the pre-eminent duty of the christian minister. It is expressly to preach the gospel, that the ministry is instituted. It is the voice of the living preacher, urging with all the powers of heart and utterance the love of the Savior, and the dread sanctions of futurity, which God blesses to the up-building of his church. All other duties should be subservient to the necessary preparation to preach the gospel. Hundreds of immortal souls are each Sabbath assembled to hear the divine message. The christian minister is God's ambassador to them. And with whatever abilities he may be endowed, he must consecrate all to the faithful enforcement of religious truth. He must diligently study, that logic may give precision to his address—that sound argument may fortify—that illustrations may adorn and illumine—that simplicity may make the opaque transparent—that rhetoric in its noblest sense may captivate the conscience and the heart. The word of truth must be rightly divided to "give to each a portion"—such a portion as each

one needs. How difficult this? Some of his hearers are engulfed in the vortices of false philosophy; some whirling in the wild career of utter godlessness and guilt; some deceived with false hopes or deceiving with false pretences; some stupid, with conscience seared and heart of granite; some tender, affectionate, trembling—with crushed and fainting spirit feeling after God. To meet these wants requires thought—long and anxious and prayerful study. And the faithful christian minister must consecrate the best hours of every week to this infinitely arduous work.

And yet he must engage in other studies besides immediate preparation for the pulpit. He must search the scriptures in their original languages; he must keep up a general acquaintance with the literature and the rapidly advancing science of the day; he must furnish his mind to encounter the unbeliever and the errorist on their own ground, and to defend the gospel; he must keep himself informed respecting the great moral movements of the age; he must not forget the mighty power of the press—that the world demands a christian literature,—that it is the duty of some of the christian ministry to endeavor to supply that want.

These duties demand, that at least every moment of the morning hours be consecrated uninterruptedly to study. These hours should be held sacred from any encroachment. The people should feel that their pastor, in all his studies, is toiling for them, and they should cordially co-operate in securing for him the unbroken hours of the morning.

2. The christian minister must also visit his people. Without this, though learned, though eloquent even, he cannot be in the highest degree useful. By personal acquaintance alone can he ascertain the temptations, the conflicts, the trials, the spiritual condition of the members of his charge. He must visit, not a few families merely, but all his flock. He must sacrifice, if necessary, the attractions of friendship and of congenial habits and taste, to his duties as a laborious and impartial parish minister, who must account to God for each soul entrusted to his care. And especially wherever poverty lays its heavy hand, or age is crushed with infirmities, or the suffering invalid, with weak and perishing body, lingers on the bed of pain, or the widow's heart is bleeding with anguish,—wherever there is any one bowed down beneath the burden of life, it is there, there peculiarly that the christian minister is bound to go.

There are probably more than two hundred families connected with this large congregation,—all of whom must be visited. The sick and bereaved must be visited often; weddings must be attended, and funerals. There are days of sickness and of storms when no visits can be made. The reception of parishioners and other friends, and various family cares, necessarily engross an important portion of one's time. There are public duties of associations and councils and societies of benevolence, which claim attention. And seasons of re-

laxation are absolutely indispensable to the hard student, that the exhausted system may recover its tone. How often then can a minister, with his utmost diligence, in the midst of these interruptions and cares, go through the two hundred families of his parish? The most faithful pastors usually think they do well, if they succeed in visiting every family in the parish each year. There are few, having the charge of large congregations, who are able to do even this. If a minister does much more than this, it is pretty certain that he is neglecting his study, and that his congregation are complaining that all his sermons are alike. Any person, by a slight computation, may see the utter impossibility of a faithful minister's visiting his people with that degree of frequency which is generally desired and expected.

Having thus briefly considered the prominent duties of the pastor, let us now reflect upon the corresponding duties of the people.

1. The people should give their minister their confidence and affection. His character ought to be such as to merit their kind regard, and if he have it not, he labors unavailingly. When he enters the pulpit, let him be encouraged by the thought that the partiality of friendship will give weight to his words, will overlook those infirmities, and extenuate those defects incident to humanity. Let him repose in the assurance that if exemplary in labor and in life, his parishioners will guard his reputation, and uphold his proper influence.

Your pastor is to plead with you in reference to the most precious interests of your souls; he is to urge upon you the consideration of your sins; he is faithfully to warn you against every spiritual danger; he is to blend his sympathies with your own in your hours of bereavement and of sorrow; if you fall before temptation, and every friend abandon you, your pastor must never abandon you; he is perchance to stand at your bedside, when you are struggling your painful way through death's dark valley, and, when the struggle is over, he is to urge the consolations of the gospel upon the hearts of weeping friends in all the freshness of their anguish. And how can he discharge these duties if he have not your confidence and affection? It is not merely a mercenary tie which unites pastor and flock;—by which they pay so much money, and he performs so much work;—you expect more than the work. You expect, and have a right to expect, the heart of your pastor,—that he will incorporate your joys and sorrows into his own bosom,—that he will be, as it were, a member of your family,—one to whom you can ever go, sure of prayerful interest and sympathy; who, in the glad hour of the bridal, and in the weeping hour of the burial, can rejoice with you and weep with you. And he must feel that he is with friends; that to his parishioners he can unbosom all his heart, with no fear that his confidence will be abused; that he can speak with frankness and freedom, unapprehensive that his words will be perverted; that,

should an unguarded expression fall from his lips, kind charity will bury it. How happy the union when thus cemented! How wretched when blasted by the demon of disaffection and strife!

2. The christian pastor needs the constant attendance of his parishioners at the stated seasons of public worship. If it be his duty to preach, it is their duty to hear. Let him see his efforts appreciated, the house of worship crowded, and it will invigorate him to redoubled exertions. Hope will inspire his mind and warm his heart. But his energies are palsied, should he fear that if the Sabbath be a little too warm, or a little too cold, a little too sunny, or a little too cloudy, should the mist sweep through the air, or the beautiful snow flake fall, the empty walls of the church will send back in chilling tones the echo of his voice. It is hardly in human nature to triumph over such discouragements.

I plead not that the invalid should be imprudent, I plead only that the healthy should be conscientious; I plead only that the congregation be not a fair weather congregation—a Sabbath morning congregation. Comforts are now so multiplied that all ordinary weather may be safely encountered by all but the feeble or infirm. Let habit become nature. Come with your families, like Israel's tribes, to this spacious and beautiful temple. Go out into the highways and hedges, and invite guests. Throw open your doors with cordiality to the stranger, and let congregation and pastor be animated by the sublime spectacle of a thronged sanctuary. Be assured that there is no other way in which you can pass your Sabbaths so happily; there is no other way of employing these sacred hours, which will be so promotive of both the temporal and the spiritual prosperity—the moral and the intellectual improvement of yourselves and your families.

The sublime contemplations of the pulpit alike tend to expand the intellect and to purify the heart, to diffuse those virtues which grace the hours of domestic privacy and affection, and that sobriety, integrity and industry, which constitute the foundation of individual happiness and national prosperity. And it is thus alone that you can prepare for those fearful scenes of death, resurrection, judgment, and eternity, to which all are so rapidly hastening.

3. The christian minister must have the attention of his hearers. The difference between different congregations, in this respect, is wonderful. Here every eye is attentive, and every ear listening; there the leaden spirit of stupidity and slumber apparently envelops all senses. Doubtless much in this respect depends upon the pastor; still much upon the people. Fix the eye and open the ear, and the most phlegmatic speaker will be animated. Close the eye and send the mind roving the world, or lock it up in the gloomy caves of night and sleep, and the flaming zeal of a seraph would expire. If it be true that a lifeless pastor makes a sleepy flock, the converse is none the less true.

It is not in the nature of ordinary men, to study and preach with

ardor and with interest unless attention can be secured. If lethargic fumes pervade the house, he must inhale the drowsy influence. Attention requires effort. One must beat against the gales of worldly cares, and by vigorous struggling chain the reluctant mind to the presented truth, till habit makes the effort easy. "Take heed how you hear," is a divine injunction. Truths unentertaining may be infinitely important. Many subjects must be urged which it is difficult to invest with popular attractions. And yet in their discussion the mind accustomed to thought will find rich interest and profit.

Take two young men of equal capacity; let one discipline his mind to attention on the Sabbath, and the other indulge in listlessness; and at the close of the year the former will be decisively the superior of the latter in all the attributes of intellect. His intelligent face will show it; his dignified deportment will show it, and the voice of the community will attest it. There is absolutely nothing comparable to the sublime revelations of the gospel to exalt one in the scale of mental being.

4. The christian minister needs the cordial co-operation of his church. In all his plans of usefulness he needs their support. But most especially does he require their constant attendance upon the stated religious meetings. This church have established, in addition to the two services on the Sabbath, a religious meeting in the lecture room on Sabbath evening, and a lecture on Wednesday evening in the same place. It doubtless is the unanimous decision of this church that these meetings ought to be sustained; not languidly, ever dying yet never dead, but with energy and vigor. How effect this? There is but one answer. The church as a body must attend. Without this all other influences are unavailing. If they who love Christ and his cause, are neither impelled by duty nor attracted by desire to the evening meeting, surely those will not be allured who, as yet, have no acquaintance with a Savior's love. If the disciples of the Redeemer, in the weariness of ordinary business, or in the multiplication of worldly cares, can find exemption, surely the young, the thoughtless, the unrenewed, will not take their lonely way to the deserted temple. "I am but one," says the disciple, seeking to quiet reproachful conscience, "I shall not be missed." Let each one say the same, and every energy of the church is paralyzed. Scarcely can one find a more cheerless and depressing sight than a few individuals scattered over an almost empty lecture room for evening worship. The voice of prayer, reverberated through the desolate hall, sounds gloomy and dispiriting. There is not spiritual or physical strength to give the hymn a voice, and it dies unborn. This is truly the frigid zone of devotion. If one does not freeze there, it is because he has a fire in his heart so warm that the ices around cannot quench it. Would you convince an anxious inquirer that religion is but a heartless pretence, send him to such a meeting, and let him there inquire where are the church. But what sight is more invigorating than a thronged lecture room, in the sacred silence of the evening? There is an influence in

the hour itself, which subdues and mollifies the soul. The softened light, the still assembly, the gentle tones of prayer, the plaintive or the animated hymn, the outward darkness, the social sympathies awakened by the scene, all are conducive to the holiest impressions. And should the wind, admonishing of the gathering storm, moan about the building, or the rain or sleet patter upon the glass, those pensive emotions are still more strongly awakened, which ever wing the soul to explore eternity. Disciples of Jesus, you have few duties paramount to this. Let such meetings be appointed, as can be sustained, and make it a matter of conscience to sustain them. There is a dangerous tendency at the present time, to multiply religious meetings to such a degree that they are all thinly attended. It is a great and a disastrous error. Any meeting which diminishes the attendance upon the stated public services, so far inflicts a serious injury upon the cause of Christ. If the claims of business or family cares are such, that you can attend but one religious meeting during the days intervening the Sabbath, by all means let it be the meeting where the brethren are "with one accord in one place." Many can with perfect convenience meet in other circles of devotion. And this is well. But let it never be done at the expense of the stated weekly lecture.

And where can *any of this congregation* more rationally and profitably pass an evening hour than in reflecting upon the sublime truths of revelation,—the government of God, the duties and dangers and destiny of man, and the realities of eternity? We invite you all, beloved hearers, to meet with us, that we may together anticipate and provide for the dread scenes we are soon to enter. We have an equal interest in eternal realities. We are fellow immortals. We are fellow travelers to the uninterrupted joys of heaven or to the endless despair of hell. And it is wise for each one of us—

"To steal awhile away
From every cumbering care,
And spend the hours of setting day
In humble, grateful prayer."

And I do here affectionately and earnestly invite every member of the choir, to assist us in our evening devotions in the lecture room. You contribute much to the enjoyment of public worship in this sanctuary, and the congregation are grateful for your voluntary aid. We should love to hear your voices in the solemn hour of the evening, adding an additional charm to our evening devotions. And not for our sakes alone do we invite you. It is for yours also. We will hope and pray that you may all thus be prepared to unite with the heavenly choir, in singing the anthems of redeeming love.

5. I cannot in this connection forget the claims of the Sabbath school. This is peculiarly the nursery which the church must cultivate. The pastor ought not, and absolutely cannot, in addition to his other Sabbath day duties, devote much attention to the Sabbath

school. To this work the church should consecrate its best energies. There are few spots on this globe where this labor is more imperiously demanded than here. Many of the lads, now thronging our streets, are, for the time being, essentially fatherless. Thousands of miles of stormy ocean, and weary months and years separate the father from his bereaved family. Oh, how many an anxious father is now tossed upon the bosom of the Pacific, with heart more restless, perhaps, than the heaving billows which are his home. His tempest tossed ship and the midnight storm, could divulge many a secret of his frequent anguish, as he reflects upon his children, growing to maturity, deprived of a father's care. Yes! many prayers have ascended from lips, perhaps all unused to pray, as the anxious parent, true to nature's instincts, in darkness and tempests, is compelled to think of his loved and long lost home. The last words which a departing father uttered to a teacher of this Sabbath school, as he unfurled his sails for his long long voyage, were, "take care of my boy." And think you that father forgot his boy, as he passed the blazing line, as he doubled the stormy cape, as he pursued for months and years, his gigantic game over the illimitable ocean? Absent fathers, we will not forget your children. We will love them, and watch over them, and pray for them, and plead with them, and do all we can to train them up for usefulness and for heaven.

And how soon will many of these boys leave all the privileges they now enjoy, to encounter hardship, to brave danger, to endure almost every spiritual privation. The other side of the globe will witness their perils and their toils, and years will elapse ere they will again revisit these scenes of their childhood.

"Their march is on the mountain wave;
Their home is on the deep."

They are hastening to scenes of dangerous adventure, where no Sabbath bell is heard, where no church is reared, where no gospel is proclaimed, where all the precious safeguards of mother and sister and home are lost. And when temptations multiply and restraints vanish, what preservative have they but christian principle previously implanted in the youthful mind? And there is an influence in the agitated elements in the midst of which they live, in the storms which sweep around them, in the perils which ever threaten them, in the emergencies of difficulty which they must surmount, in the daring essential to attack and destroy

"That sea-beast
Leviathan, which God, of all his works,
Created hugest which swim the ocean stream;"

there is, I say, an influence to be found in these scenes of the physical and the moral sublime, which calls into exercise the loftiest traits of our nature; which expands the soul and invigorates all its powers.

Let religion enthrone herself in the heart, and mould and modulate all these influences, and how blessed the result.

Many of these youth will attain eminence in their calling. They will become masters of ships, and stamp the image of their piety or their ungodliness upon large crews, almost totally under their control. They will touch at those islands of the seas, where feeble christian bands are struggling against all the powers of heathenism; where, as pious men, they may strengthen the hands and the hearts of our devoted missionaries, or, as the foes of Christ, may magnify immeasurably their discouragements and their sufferings. Oh, what a claim have these children upon the care of this church. No pains should be spared to gather them all into the Sabbath school, and when there is a demand for a teacher, each one who is capable of teaching should say, "Here, Lord, am I, send me."

Fathers and mothers! would you have your children virtuous, intelligent, and respectable? would you have them love and obey their heavenly Father and their earthly parents? would you have them taught to avoid all temptation and sin? would you have them comfort you, in their old age, by the excellence of their characters and their affection? would you finally have them die the death of the righteous, and inherit the mansions of heaven forever?—oh, send them to the Sabbath school, where they will be taught the law of God, where they will hear of a Savior's love, where the joyful and awful realities of the eternal world will be urged upon the mind.

This union, my beloved parishioners, into which we have now entered, must, at the longest, be short. Swiftly gliding years are hurrying you to the grave. One of my most solemn, affecting, and frequent duties will be to assist in the mournful rites of your burial. Already have I seen four of your number consigned to the tomb. Whose form will next be shrouded for the grave? From which of your dwellings shall the funeral procession next move? We cannot tell. But this we know. One after another, all your dwellings must be desolate. One after another, you must all die. It will seem but as the passing of a dream ere we shall all be gone; pastor and people, we shall all have disappeared from earth, and shall have entered scenes of endless joy or wo, in distant worlds. Are you, my dear hearers, prepared to die—to rise again—to meet your Savior at the judgment throne—to be judged according to the things written in the book of life? Have you yielded to the persuasions of the Spirit striving for your salvation? Have you publicly acknowledged your acceptance of that Savior who died on the cross to redeem you? Are you daily exercising penitence, and continuing instant in prayer? Are you engaged with all your heart in the attainment of holiness, and in the endeavor to lead others to the knowledge of a Savior's love? In fine, have you good evidence that Christ recognizes you as a disciple and a friend—that your sins are all forgiven, and that you have secured an inheritance with the saints in light? These are the questions the faithful pastor must urge upon his parishioners with untiring

earnestness. When death shall have palsied my tongue and closed your ears, we shall soon meet again. The fearful thunders of the resurrection trump will summon us. We shall stand together at that awful bar whose decisions are irreversible and eternal. We shall retrace life's transient yet momentous scenes, with inexpressible joy or unutterable despair. And should it appear on that awful day that your pastor has not faithfully delivered to you the whole counsel of God, or that you have refused to heed his warnings, it had been better for us that we had never been born.

Oh God, grant that in the morning of the resurrection, we may all be found on the happy shores of the heavenly Canaan, to hear the welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servants," and to "enter Zion with songs and everlasting joy."

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